How Germany's Humbled Warcraft Came to America

U. S. Naval Officer in Charge Tells of Last Tragic Trip Across Atlantic

This article was written by Captain Julius Frederick Hellweg, U. S. N., senior officer on the voyage across the Atlantic of the German warships allocated to the United States. He tells of the work that was done to prepare them for the trip and the precautions that had to be taken to protect them.

By Captain J. F. Hellweg, U.S.N.

FOR many years all good Huns toasted "Der Tag" on every possible occasion. By good Huns was meant all those inhabitants of Germany, and particularly Prussia, whose ideas of right and wrong were so perverted they could commit the most terrible acts of frightfulness without the slightest sign of remorse.

Bismarck, the idol of Germans for years and a strong advocate of "frightfulness," is credited with the following regulation issued to Prussian soldiers governing their actions in 1870 against the French: ". . . above all, you must inflict on the inhabitants of invaded towns the maximum of suffering, so that they may become sick of the struggle, and may bring pressure to bear on their government to discontinue it; you must leave the people through whom you march only their eyes to weep with." And the believers of the Bismarck philosophy followed literally this regulation during the recent war, as the French and Belgians learned to their sorrow.

The arrogance of these warriors was so great they could not resist toasting "Der Tag," even in the presence of citizens of those countries whom they meant to crush and ruin when "Der Tag" arrived.

At the Rendezvous

On November 21, 1918, the German High Seas Fleet appeared out of the mist shortly after 9 a. m., in latitude 56 deg. 11 min. North and longitude 1 deg. 20 min. West, and there met the Grand Fleet, under command of Admiral Sir David Beatty, R. N., and proceeded into a British port escorted and watched—on both flanks by the British, American and French ships, all cleared for action; for, don't forget, they were escorting Huns.

The German High Seas Fleet that steamed to the rendezvous that memorable day in November, 1918, consisted of the following ships:

Battle cruisers—Seydlitz, flying the flag of Commodore Tägert; Moltke, Derflinger, Hindenburg and the Von Der Tan.

Battleships—Friedrich der Grösse, flying the flag of Rear Admiral von Reuter, the commander in chief of the High Seas Fleet; König Albert, Kaiser, Kaiserin, Prinzregent Luitpold, Bayern, Kronprinz Wilhelm, Mark Graf and the Grösser Kurfirst.

Cruisers—Karlsruhe, flying the flag of Commodore Harder; Frankfurt, Emden, Nornberg, Brummer, Köln and the Bremse.

The destroyers and other small ships were not surrendered until a later date.

No one except a Prussian could fully appreciate how different was that November 21, 1918, from "Der Tag" which he had been dreaming about and toasting for years. The rest of the world can thank God "Der Tag" never dawned.

On June 21, 1919, seven months later to a day, the German ships were scuttled at Scapa Flow.

The work of raising the smaller ships was soon under way, and nine months later, March, 1920, I was detached from duty in France and ordered to Rosyth, Scotland, for duty in connection with the refitting of the ex-German ships for the trip to the United States.

A Sorry Picture

A more dismal sight than the German destroyers can hardly be pictured. Moored by pairs to buoys in the Firth of Forth, rusted and stripped, sides stoved in, masts broken, rails bent and twisted, bridge screens tattered and flapping in the wind, decks littered with wreckage, guns pointed skyward, for all the world like soldiers with both hands in the air yelling "Kamarad!" even the boats themselves listing toward one another as if they were too tired and too worn out to stand up straight. They truly presented a sorry picture, their silhouettes sharply outlined against the gray, lowering sky of a stormy Scotch afternoon.

On going on board the ships allocated to the United States it was quickly seen that the task of preparing them for their long trip to the United States was a big one, one that would tax the ability and perseverance of all hands connected with the work. As the ships had been submerged for a long period they had, naturally, collected considerable silt. Some of their compartments were still partially flooded, and all were filled with every conceivable kind of wreckage.

Most of the gear that had not been wrecked had been carried off, so that it was with rather a hopeless feeling that I completed my first inspection and returned on board the ship of the senior officer present.

At that time, March, 1920, we had assembled in the Firth of Forth the following American ships:

The Chattanooga, Captain V. A. Kimberly; the Panther, Commander C. E. Wood; the Hovey, Commander S. B. McKinney; the Chandler, Lieutenant Commander F. Cogswell, and the Ballard, Lieutenant Commander H. T. Settle.

A couple of weeks later three mine sweepers, the Red Wing, Lieutenant F. C. A. Plagemann; the Rail, Lieutenant A. E. Freed, and the Falcon, Lieutenant W. B. Buchanan, arrived from the United States for duty in connection with the towing of the three ex-German destroyers home.

Making Repairs

Working parties from all these ships were immediately put on board the three destroyers, the G-102, the S-132, the V-43, and the cruiser Frankfurt, to dig out the dirt preparatory to starting repairs. The inspection of the cruiser Frankfurt, a 5,500-ton vessel, showed her to be in much the same condition, compartments flooded, nearly everything either wrecked or gone and the entire ship littered with an indescribable mass of wreckage. One wondered where all the stuff with which the ship was glutted came from.

All four of these ships had to be docked, cleaned, painted, their propellers removed to facilitate towing home, and all the numerous holes in their sides and underwater bodies plugged as a safety precaution for the long trip across the open sea.

The British naval officials were very courteous in assisting us with our work, particularly the Admiral Superintendent of the Rosyth Dock Yard, Rear Admiral Sir John Green, R. N., who commanded the battleship H. M. S. New Zealand at Jutland, and Captain Curtis, R. N., in command of the destroyer base at Port Edgar. Captain Curtis had commanded the Harwich patrol, a most hazardous billet, and later a mining division during the war, and was decorated by the King for his heroic work. Thanks to the courteous cooperation of these two officers we were permitted to place our destroyers in the destroyer pen (docks) at Port Edgar and to tie up a German destroyer alongside each of ours, thereby increasing the speed of our work enormously.

The Repair Ship

In the mean time the U. S. S. Panther, our repair ship, was devoting all her attention to the cleaning of the cruiser Frankfurt, preparatory to actual repair work.

Five weeks quickly passed and the long expected transport arrived from the United States with the officers and draft of bluejackets for the ex-German ships. Soon after the arrival of the U. S. S. Hancock, commanded by Captain J. G. Church, U. S. N., the other ships, which had been needed for some time in the Mediterranean and elsewhere, were detached, and one by one we saw them sail away until we were finally "on our own" with our wrecks, the transport and the repair ship.

I left France March 8 on hurry-up orders, as the ex-German dreadnought was expected to sail immediately. Internal troubles in Germany prevented her sailing until, just as I was beginning to wonder whether she would ever arrive, word was received that she was due on April 5. Everything was made ready, but again it proved to be a false alarm. On April 6, however, the British Admiralty notified us that a tug would be placed at our disposal the next morning, the 7th, to take us to sea to meet the German convoy which was due that afternoon.

All of our arrangements had been carefully prepared for a long time, and it needed only the signal for all hands to be in their places.

Tricks Attempted

Our navy will long remember the numerous tricks attempted by the Hun sympathizers on the German merchant ships which we seized and fitted out as transports to carry our troops to France. Armed with this previous experience, we were prepared to block them if they attempted any of their usual tricks. I need only add that the Huns ran true to form, and that the only reason their efforts were unsuccessful was because the American bluejacket is hard to beat.

Our boarding party consisted of thirteen officers and fifty-four bluejackets, equipped with gas masks, miners' lamps, electric torches, tools, etc. A medical officer with a hospital party accompanied us; and, in addition, there was an armed guard under the command of a particularly level-headed officer.

Shortly before 2 o'clock we could make out the smoke on the horizon, and soon the convoy hove in sight led by the British battle cruiser H. M. S. Tiger and convoyed by British destroyers. The ex-German battleship Nassau was towing the dreadnought Ostfriesland, and cast off as soon as our tugs rounded to close aboard. By 3:30 p. m. our party was alongside and the British tugs took the Ostfriesland in tow and stood up the Firth of Forth.

The crew, of which there was quite a large number, stood above on deck—an ill dressed, dirty, unshaven, sullen looking crowd—watching us closely as we climbed on board. There was not a single officer in sight, a discourtesy that did not surprise me in the least. Orders had been given to our men to have no dealings whatever with them, to ignore them completely. Accompanied by a British pilot and a helmsman, I made my way to the bridge, where I found two German officers whom I ignored as completely as they had ignored our arrival on board. I took charge and stood in to our anchorage.

On the way to port, our bluejackets divided into ten parties, each under the immediate supervision of an officer, and inspected the ship to insure that everything was safe and seaworthy.

Planned to Loot Ships

It was quite dark when we finally anchored in the Firth of Forth shortly after 8 o'clock near Burntisland. The Germans were immediately ordered to leave the ship, and were transferred by tug to the steamer Rugen for return to Germany. This unexpected order to clear the ship that night evidently capsized their plans, and they objected to leaving. Had they been permitted to remain on board that night they would have looted everything possible. It was found that they had made elaborate plans to pillage the ship thoroughly. The magnitude of their efforts astonished me. For instance, they had actually prepared to remove all the motor generators from the ship; ventilators and ventilating motors, fittings, spare parts, etc. Small parts were collected in bundles and well secured for easy handling. I was surprised that they were not preparing to lift the main engines. There wasn't much else that they had not started to remove. We caught one able-bodied German soldier trying to carry a motor weighing approximately one hundred pounds over the side in a box hidden under his clothes. Our armed guard was stationed at the gangway and searched any man whose actions aroused suspicion. Our bluejackets below caught their fireroom force trying to light off fires under the dead boilers. Had they succeeded, they would have ruined the boilers completely and we could not have steamed home until after very extensive repairs. For several days we continued to find evidence of their elaborate schemes for looting.

Condition of the Ship

The condition in which we found the ship is indescribable. Those of you who saw service in France during the war know how the Germans left a town on being forced to evacuate it. That's how we found this ship.

After forty-one days of the hardest and dirtiest kind of work, during which time the crew frequently worked late into the night, the ship was clean enough to hoist the American flag, and on May 18, at 4:18 p. m., the U. S. S. Ostfriesland was commissioned with appropriate ceremony.

Having completed the repairs to the destroyers, they, in tow of the mine sweeps and convoyed by the U. S. S. Hancock, sailed from Rosyth, Scotland, on June 7, on the first leg of their long journey home. They arrived at Brest, France, four days later, having covered the 800 miles without accident. The sweeps immediately returned to Rosyth.

The remainder of the convoy, consisting of the dreadnought Ostfriesland and the cruiser Frankfurt, sailed from Rosyth on June 17 for Brest, France. On this run the Frankfurt was towed by two of the sweeps.

Prior to our departure from Rosyth we had received final orders to take home, if possible, four large naval guns weighing over 250 tons. These guns had formed a reserve for our battleship squadron in European waters during the war, and would have been needed had our ships had a fight and injured their own. The cost of transporting such awkward and large weights by commercial carrier is very expensive and the carrying home of these four large guns by the Ostfriesland represents a very neat sum which Uncle Sam can slip in his pocket. In fact, it has been stated that the saving represents more than the total amount of money allowed for the refitting of these five vessels preparatory to taking them home.

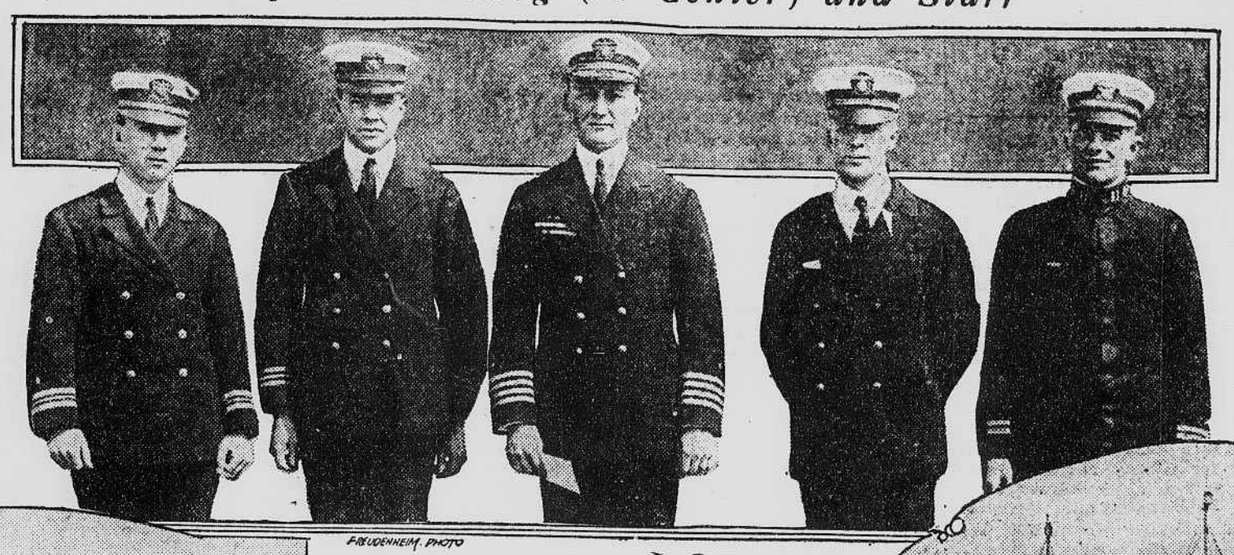
At Brest, France, we made final preparations for our long leg home, taking all the stores remaining at Brest, where we had one of our largest naval bases during the war. In addition, all the navy dead which had been disinterred in France and which were ready for shipment, were placed on board the U. S. S. Hancock for transportation to New York.

We sailed from Brest, France, on July 13 by way of the Azores Islands, where the navy also had an important base during the war. On this leg each sweep towed one destroyer, the U. S. S. Ostfriesland towed the Frankfurt and the U. S. S. Hancock brought up the tail of the formation. On a long towing voyage of over 4,300 miles it is only natural that casualties should occur, even if the ships are in good condition to start with. But to attempt to tow four ships which had been purposely scuttled and left submerged for a long period, one of which, a cruiser of 5,500 tons, had to be towed by another German ship which had been lying idle in Germany for more than a year, was not any insurance of a monotonous trip. Many casualties occurred, some unimportant, others serious, one quite dangerous; but we were blessed with excellent weather throughout the voyage, which lightened our labors enormously.

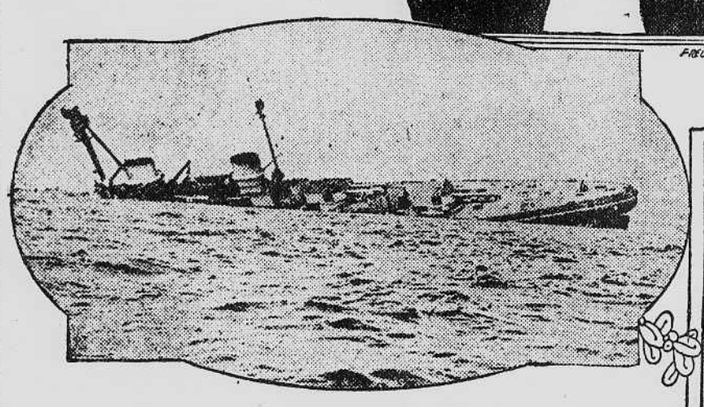
The one dangerous casualty referred to and a shortage of coal necessitated our touching in at Ponta Delgada, Azores, where we were delayed one week until repairs could be effected and coal taken on board.

After a trip of fifty-four days since leaving Scotland we stood up the Narrows and passed the Goddess of Liberty on August 9, 1920.

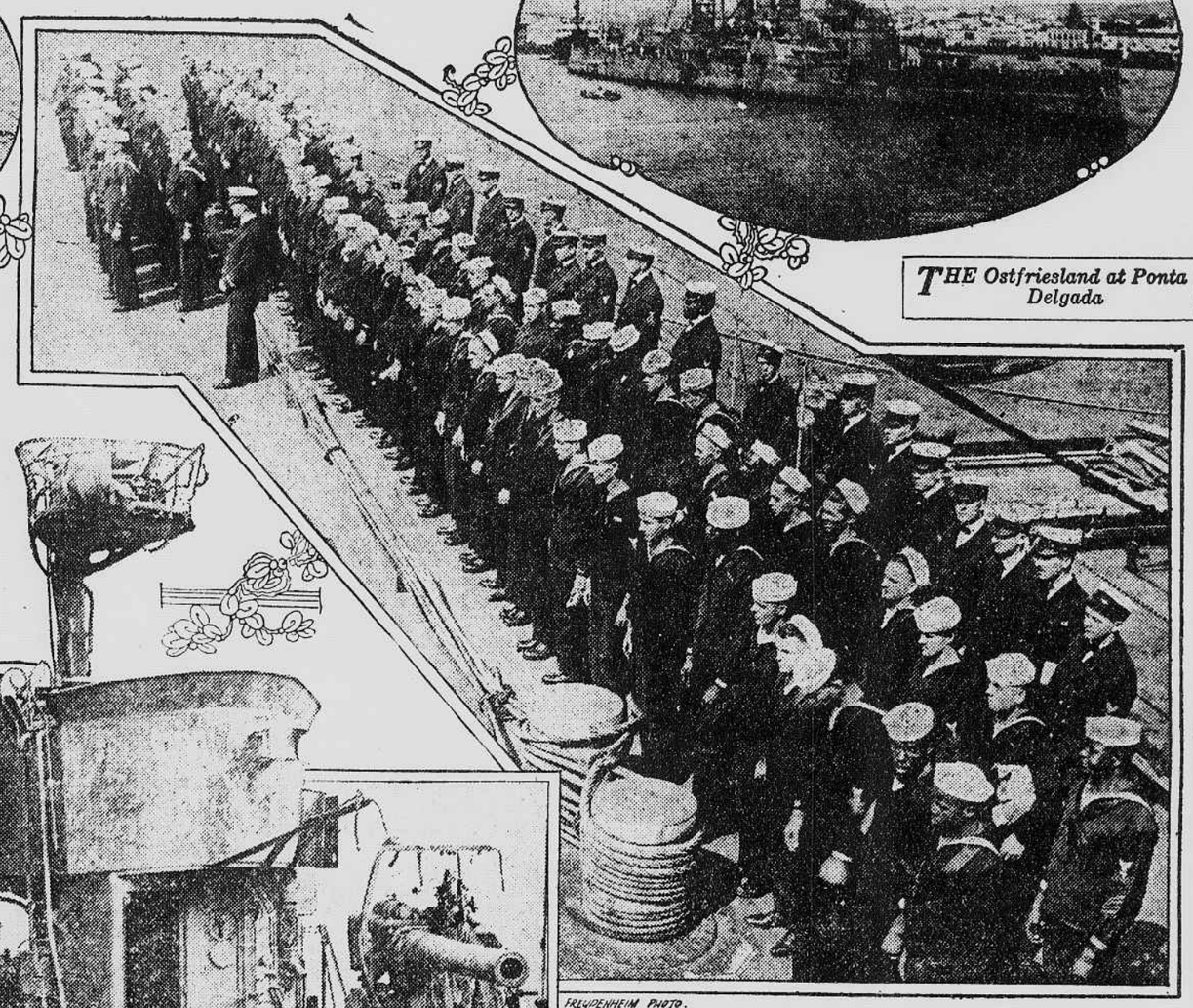
Captain Hellweg (in Center) and Staff



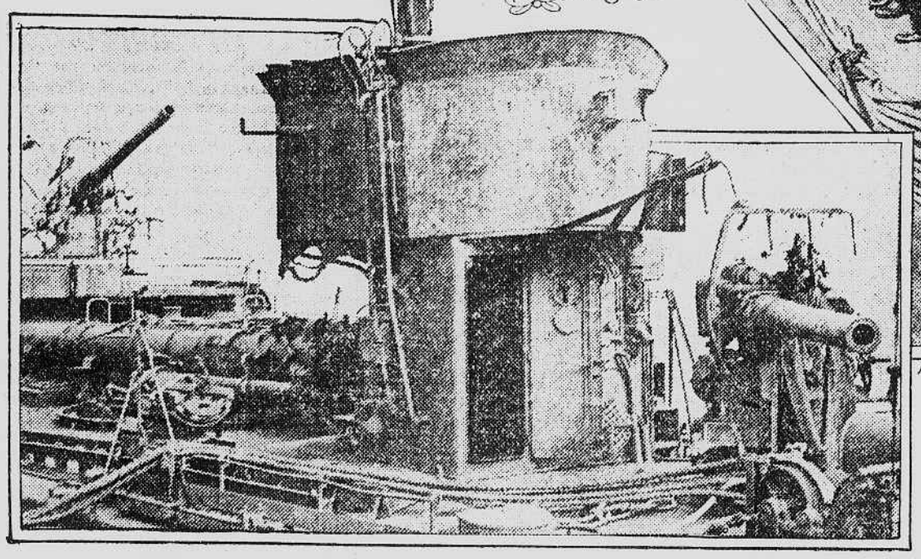
FREUDENHEIM PHOTO.



THE German warship Derflinger taking her last plunge



THE Ostfriesland at Ponta Delgada



A TYPICAL scene on one of the German destroyers after being raised at Scapa Flow

FREUDENHEIM PHOTO.

AMERICAN sailors lined up on board the Ostfriesland as the ship was taken out of commission at New York Navy Yard

Vigilance Marked Passage and Care Was Taken Against Trickery

American Girl Helps to Restore Asia Minor Villages

PUTTING a war-ruined village in Asia Minor back on a pre-war basis is not the easiest task that a young American woman could attempt, even though she is backed by the generous financial assistance of her alma mater. But this is just what a Providence school teacher has accomplished, and now she is getting ready to do the same thing for other villages, without the additional expenditure of any more money.

If the achievement is not repeated over and over again it won't be the fault of Miss Gertrude Knox, of Mount Holyoke College. A great deal depends on the little Greek village of Chirakman.

Before the war, when Miss Knox was still a student at Mount Holyoke, Chirakman was prosperous, one of the most prosperous villages to be found in the neighborhood of the Black Sea port of Samsoun. Rich crops of tobacco and corn kept its inhabitants rich and well fed. But all changed when the Kaiser and the Sultan agreed to stand together.

Miss Knox didn't know Chirakman in the days of plenty. It was a far different village when she visited it about a year ago.

"Nothing remains of the village but the blackened foundations of the two hundred houses that once sheltered the villagers," she wrote. "The people themselves have been driven off or killed. A few have courageously returned to the almost hopeless task of rebuilding their homes and recultivating their fields. But they have nothing to work with, the Turks have taken their oxen and their cattle, and seeds are lacking. Desolation is everywhere. Something must be done."

And something was done. Mount Holyoke College raised a little more than $4,000 and Miss Knox raised a determination in her own mind and in those of her fellow workers of the Near East Relief.

Twenty-one groups of villagers were chosen, representing almost thirty families aggregating about 150 persons. To each was lent about $200 for the purchase of oxen, seed and tools.

"The acreage of corn which these families could plant, it was estimated," Miss Knox wrote, "would more than provide them their winter's food, and the tobacco would make possible the payment of all debts and give the villagers a good income besides. For each villager a guaranty was secured from among the Samsoun business men, and a note was taken payable in a year's time, with 5 per cent interest.

"Now the village has begun to flourish once more. Rich crops of tobacco are everywhere in evidence. Quantities of corn decorate the hillsides. Temporary wooden huts have been built alongside the foundations of the former homes of stone, which gradually are being restored.

"It is along such lines as this that American charity, extended through the Near East Relief, is doing the most good. If the Chirakman villagers pay their debt this spring the same work can be carried on in other villages, and gradually be increased as interest on the loans accumulates."

Miss Knox, whose home is in Providence, R. I., joined the Near East Relief in February, 1919, and sailed shortly afterward for overseas. She was formerly a teacher in Lincoln School, Providence.

Chinese Hold Firmly to Graft

By Morris R. Warner

SHANGHAI, Sept. 25—One trait firmly imbedded in the Chinese character which the foreign business man and the housewife both have to contend with is the weakness for "squeeze." It is said by foreigners that the Chinese merchant, coolie, politician, fisherman, chauffeur and beggar would rather make $1 by "squeeze" than $10 by the same amount of brain-work or manual labor.

Squeeze is Chinese for graft. It is a word in that international Far Eastern tongue known as pidgin-English. But squeeze is something more than graft. Its political phase might be termed graft, and that form of squeeze is what makes the military governors of the provinces and the politicians of Peking and Canton so fat. Most Chinese politicians would have been acceptable in the eyes of Julius Cæsar, and squeeze is the reason for some of the corpulence in China.

Squeeze is the Chinese translation of "as much as the traffic will bear." It is a factor in Chinese business, as much as supply and demand, or profit and loss. Every foreign lawyer practicing in China has what is known as an interpreter. The interpreter acts as the go-between for the lawyer with his clients and also as translator of their ideas. But he is more than that. He gets business, and he receives a recognized commission from the lawyer for that service. However, he is rarely satisfied with that commission. He receives a prospective client before the lawyer sees him and demands of the client a detailed description of his case. Then he indicates to the client that it may be possible for the lawyer to give some of his valuable time to the consideration of this petty affair, but the favor of such consideration, besides the fee which the lawyer demands, will cost the client a certain additional sum to be paid to the interpreter, who will do his best to get the favor of the honorable and distinguished lawyer's valuable attention in this matter. The Chinese litigant agrees to these terms, for he knows that this is squeeze and that he himself has employed the same practice in his own business. Such dealings are not illegitimate in China, although foreigners sometimes regard them as such. To date all attempts by foreigners to do away with squeeze have failed miserably.

The house-boy who is asked to take shoes to the shoemaker comes back and demands 50 cents for the repair of the shoes, out of which he makes about 10 cents. The cook who buys beans makes a few coppers on his purchase. Everybody squeezes.